

12. HABITS OF THE BANK MYNA, *ACRIDOTHERES GINGINIANUS*

In the HANDBOOK (1972, Vol. 5:1981-2) there is a lively description of the habits of the Bank Myna, *Acridotheres ginginianus*, which in addition to its presence in restless small flocks near refuge dumps, railway stations, near food stalls and some bazaars (Old Delhi), is traditionally found in fields following the ploughing cattle or perched familiarly on cattle and buffalo's backs and heads looking for ticks or insects disturbed by their feet. My wife and I with an American Embassy Officer, Peter Kaestner, had been commenting on the species' characteristic presence in cultivated land near cattle on January 12, 1982 near the Sultanpur Jheels in Haryana while bird watching.

On January 13, the following day, the two of us took the morning Delhi-Bombay flight from Delhi airport. On our way out to the aircraft, wandering over the vast artificial de-

sert of tarmac with parked and moving planes, there were no birds visible except for an occasional moving kite taking advantage of a thermal updraft. However, we soon spotted a new adaptation of the cattle-riding habit. Here and there in the scattering of vehicular traffic, there were food catering vans, coming or going to the parked planes. Riding confidently on the roof, the front bonnet, or the rear ledge near the open sliding rear door of the food carrier were groups and individual busy Bank Mynas, the only bird species seen, quite at home and seemingly well adapted to their novel conveyance. They clustered only on the catering vans, not on the buses or cars, or fuel tankers. The Bank Myna appears to have adapted thus to a new urbanized niche, as I have not noticed them before in this otherwise sterile environment.

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January 15, 1982.

13. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE INTELLIGENCE OF CROWS

It is interesting to watch the behaviour of birds and specially of crows. Wherever water pots are hung on the branches of trees for birds, it is fascinating to watch the types of birds namely pigeons, sparrows, bulbuls, babblers, parakeets, doves, mynas, sunbirds, crows and other smaller birds perch on the pot to drink. Once the birds get used to certain water pots they visit them regularly and some time baffled when the water level is not replenished or the pot is empty. Invariably, it has been seen that crows consume the maxi-

mum share from the pot. It is interesting and surprising to observe a crow carrying in its beak a dried piece of bread (Chapati) and placing it inside the water pot for a couple of minutes, then it picks up and settles down on a higher branch to consume it. Thus it is evident that the object of placing the dried piece of bread is to soften it for easy consumption.

Another instance observed was that when a crow is about to build its nest, it picks up lots of small thin sticks from all over like any

other bird. When it gets hold of a small lump of coconut fibre, it carries the same and places it inside the water pot for a few minutes. The thoroughly soaked bit of fibre is picked up and the crow settles down on the ground.

By pressing the lump of fibre on the ground with one claw, the crow peels off small strips with its beak and thus manages to use the entire lot for its nest. Such intelligence is probably noticeable in the case of crows only.

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14. NEST BUILDING ERROR BY A FEMALE PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD

In July this year I was watching a Purple-rumped Sunbird building her nest in a Bougainvillea bush in my garden. The usual excited twittering which accompanies this activity could be heard throughout the day for about a week.

On closer inspection of the completed nest I was surprised to find that she had made a strange error during its construction. *The nest had no opening at all.* It was closed all round like a deflated balloon. There was no attempt at a projecting porch either. The pendant nature was basically like a normal nest, but it was not fully expanded like a correctly designed one.

After several days of excited twittering and repeatedly settling on the nest and hopping all around it, the pair unhappily left it alone. The female sunbird appeared agitated but was unable to take any corrective steps to create a hole, after the completion of the nest. This was not surprising as the entrance hole is formed during the early stage of building the nest.

I find that in a fairly large number of nests the entrance hole is placed facing the bush. I presume that the birds prefer to alight on the nest after having checked out its safety by hopping around in the bush if danger appears to be at hand. In this case there were several other trees and bushes close to the nest site. This may have confused her about its placement? The rather thin appearance of the nest is explainable, as I have noticed that the female after nearly completing the nest enters it, and by ruffling out her wings repeatedly expands it from within. This increases the space inside and probably makes the nest more comfortable for her. Since there was no way of entering this nest she could not get inside for finishing touches. However, I was unable to find out what had gone wrong during building of this nest.

Could this have been a young immature female perhaps indulging in nest building for the first time? Is it possible that she could not decide in which direction to place the hole and thus did not make one at all?

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October 14, 1981.

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